

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL OF POPULAR LITERATURE

Science and Arts.

CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM AND ROBERT CHAMBERS.

No. 492.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 1863.

PRICE 1*d.*

THE STAMP MANIA.

FIRST used, as many of our readers will remember, in 1840, the postage-stamp has only just passed out of its years of minority; and yet at this present moment there are no fewer than fifteen hundred different postage-labels in existence, and the number is increasing every month. Now that the postage-stamp has become an institution with us, people are beginning to inquire who was the author of so convenient an arrangement, and the discussion has served to exemplify the truth of the saying of the wise man: 'The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and there is no new thing under the sun.' The idea of a post-paid envelope originated early in the reign of Louis XIV. with a M. de Velaye, who, in 1653, established, under royal authority, a private penny-post in Paris, placing boxes at the corners of the streets for the reception of letters, which should be wrapped up in certain envelopes. Some of these envelopes are still extant, and one of them we have ourselves seen.

On this idea, later suggestions may or may not have been built. Dr Gray, of the British Museum, claims the merit of having suggested that letters should be prepaid with stamps as early as 1834. Before that time, Mr Charles Knight proposed a stamped cover for the circulation of newspapers. Of course, no steps were taken in respect to either of these recommendations till the period of penny postage. The credit of suggesting the postage-stamp has consequently to a considerable extent fallen to Sir Rowland Hill; but the best inquiry we have been able to institute would scarcely bear out the usual assumption; and indeed this public benefactor, crowned with so many well-won laurels, may easily afford to dispense with the adornment of this single one.

Mr Hill's famous pamphlet on *Post Reform* went through three editions rapidly; in the first edition, which was issued privately, the author makes no mention of the use of stamps—though prepayment of letters was always a principal feature in his proposals—*money payments* over the counter of the receiving-office *only* being suggested. Immediately afterwards, the members of a royal commission on the Post-office, which had been sitting since 1833, called Mr Hill before them, as also the officers of the Stamp-office, and Mr Dickenson, the

paper-maker, with several others, when the subject of letter prepayment was discussed. In the second edition of Mr Hill's pamphlet, the prepayment of letters by means of stamps or stamp envelopes is definitely recommended. When the committee of the House of Commons met to investigate the merits of Mr Hill's penny-postage scheme, they were required to express an opinion as to the desirability or otherwise of prepayment by means of stamps. Again, a favourable opinion was given of the measure, and when the government brought in and passed the penny-postage act, a clause for the use of stamps formed a component part of it. Though all agreed that stamps of some sort should come into use with the advent of cheap postage, it was by no means easy to hit upon a definite plan, or when a number of plans were submitted, to decide upon the particular one to be adopted. Stamped paper representing different charges was first suggested. Folded in a particular way, a simple revenue-stamp would then be exposed to view, and frank the letter. Another suggestion was, that a stamped wafer, as it was called, should be used, and, placed on the back of the letter, would both seal and frank it at the same time. The idea of stamped envelopes, however, was at first by far the most popular, and it was decided that they should be the prepaying medium. Plans and suggestions for the carrying out of the arrangement being required at once, the Lords of the Treasury issued a somewhat pompous proclamation, dated 23d of August 1839, inviting 'all artists, men of science, and the public in general,' to offer proposals 'as to the manner in which the stamp may best be brought into use.' So important was the subject, that Lord Palmerston, the then Foreign Secretary, was directed to apprise all foreign governments of the matter, and invite suggestions from any part of the civilised world. Three months were allowed for plans, and two prizes of two hundred pounds and one hundred pounds were to be allowed for the proposals on the subject 'which my Lords may think most deserving of attention.' The palm was carried off by Mr Mulready, R. A., who designed the envelopes now known by his name. These envelopes, which allegorically celebrated the triumphs of the post in a host of emblematical figures, were of two colours, the one for a penny being printed in black, and the other, for the twopenny postage, being in blue ink. They gave, however, so little satisfaction, and were found to be so inconvenient, that

190428

at the end of six months they were withdrawn from use. The Mulready envelopes are regarded as great curiosities by stamp-collectors, and as their value came to be about fifteen shillings, a spurious imitation has at length found its way into the market, usually to be had at half-a-crown. Last year, stamp-dealers were shocked by the Vandalism of the government, who caused many thousands of these envelopes to be destroyed at Somerset House.

Before the postage-envelope was finally withdrawn from use, the Treasury issued another prospectus, offering a reward of five hundred pounds for the best design and plan for a simple postage-label. It was made a condition that the stamp should be simple, handy, and easily placed on paper, and of a design which would make forgery difficult if not impossible. About a thousand designs were sent in, but not one was chosen. Eventually, the ugly black stamp, said to be the joint production of some of the officers of the Stamp and Post Offices, was decided upon and brought into use. Two years afterwards, this black stamp was changed to brown, principally with a view to make the obliterating process more perfect, and the better to detect the dishonesty of using old stamps. For the same reasons, the colour was again changed in a short time to red, and so it has remained to the present time. The twopenny stamp has been from the first blue. Up to this date, at different intervals, six other stamps have been issued, as the necessities of the inland or foreign postage required them. The tenpenny stamp, of an octagonal shape and brown colour, is now scarcely ever used, if it be not even withdrawn from circulation. The list comprises, besides the stamps we have mentioned, the sixpenny (lilac), the shilling (green), the fourpenny (vermilion), the threepenny (rose), and the ninepenny (yellow). The last two were issued only two or three years ago. The whole of the English stamps bear the impression of the head of Queen Victoria, and are all of the same size and shape (if we except the tenpenny stamp), the sole difference being in the colour, and in the various borderings round the Queen's portraits. Besides these distinguishing marks, however, they all tell the tale of their own value.

Our colonies issue their own stamps, with different designs. Some of them are emblematical; the Swan River Territory using the design of a 'Swan,' and the Cape of Good Hope choosing that of 'Hope' reclining; but they are gradually adopting the English plan of a simple profile of the sovereign. The portrait of our Queen appears on two hundred and forty varieties of stamps. Nearly all the stamps used in the colonies, and even some for foreign governments, are designed, engraved, printed, and embossed in London, and many of them are much prettier than the products of our own Stamp-office. The principal houses for the manufacture of colonial stamps, are Messrs De la Rue & Co., and Perkins, Bacon, & Co., of Fleet Street.

Soon after the introduction of postage-stamps, stamped envelopes were again proposed. This time the proposition was a very simple one, only consisting of the usual kind of stamp embossed on the right-hand corner of a common envelope; the stamp to be oval, round, or octagonal, according to the value of the envelope. For the envelopes themselves, a peculiar kind of paper was prepared by Mr Dickenson, and was considered on all hands to be the best possible preventive of forgery. This paper, which was manufactured with lines of thread or silk stretched through its substance, has been used ever since. Russia, in adopting the stamped envelope, guards against forgery by means of a large water-mark of a spread eagle running all over the envelope. The English Stamp-office affords every facility in the matter of stamped paper and envelopes, and private individuals may indulge their tastes to almost any extent. The officers of the Stamp-office will place an embossed stamp, for

merely its nominal value, on any kind of paper or envelope which may be sent to them for that purpose. A recent concession which has been made may be regarded as one of the latest novelties in the advertising world: under this arrangement, the Stamp-office permits embossed rings, with the name of a particular firm, to be placed round the stamp, as a border for it.

In 1844, after the exposé of the letter-opening at the General Post-office, Mr Leech gave in *Punch* his 'Anti-Graham Envelopes.' This satirical postage-envelope, afterwards engraved by Mr W. J. Linton, and widely circulated, represents Sir James Graham sitting as 'Britannia.'

For eight long years, the English people may be said to have enjoyed a complete monopoly in postage-stamps. Towards the close of 1848, they were introduced into France, and subsequently into every civilised nation in the world. The royal portrait is in most countries the prevailing design; exceptional cases occur, in which eagles, crosses, caps of liberty, and coats of arms appear. In a few cases, the stamp simply bears in figures the value of the label. Only this year, has the postage-stamp penetrated into the Ottoman empire, where, as Mohammedien usage will not admit of his portrait being presented, the stamps are designed so as to shew a fac-simile of the sultan's signature.

All the postage-stamps used in this country are manufactured at Somerset House, and the entire establishment, which is distinct from the other branches of the Inland Revenue Department, is managed at the annual expense of thirty thousand pounds. Of this sum, nineteen thousand pounds is the estimated cost for the present year, 1863—1864, of paper for labels and envelopes, and for printing, gumming, and folding. About five thousand pounds will be necessary to pay the salaries of the various officers, including five hundred pounds to the supervisor, and one hundred pounds to the superintendent of the perforating process. Mr Edwin Hill, a brother of Sir Rowland Hill, is at the head of the department. Little is known of the way in which the stamps are made, nor is it thought desirable that their manufacture should be generally understood. Paper of a peculiar make is used for their manufacture—the stamps are of course printed in sheets—all the stamps of a sheet are struck from the same die or punch—the blocks used are of first-class quality, and only subjected to a certain number of impressions, after which they are entirely relieved from duty. After printing, the sheets are covered with a gelatine matter, to render the stamps adhesive. Drilling the sheets is the last process before the stamps are fit for use. This process consists simply of puncturing the narrow spaces round each stamp with a number of small round holes, so that one stamp may be torn from the other with ease and safety. We say *simply*; but it was not a matter of easy arrangement, when we reflect that the numerous holes made on a sheet of stamps are not such as may be made in any printer's establishment, for the pieces of paper forming the circles require to be cut completely out. For a number of years, in fact, till very recently, stamps had to be separated from each other by knives or scissors. The invention of the perforating apparatus was attended with considerable labour and ingenuity, and the inventor received from the government the sum of four thousand pounds for the exclusive use of his patent.

Of course, great precaution is taken in the printing of the stamps to provide against forgery. All the lines and marks, as well as the initial letters in each corner, mean something, and the whole affair is regarded as almost inimitable. Take a penny stamp and look at it narrowly: running up each side we have a narrow slip of prettily carved trellis-work; in the two corners at the top, there are two small figured spaces, with the word 'Postage' between

them; and at the other two corners, two more square spaces, each containing a letter of the alphabet. No one of the two hundred and forty stamps in a sheet will exhibit the same two letters, but the changes on the alphabet are rung throughout the series. This mystic arrangement of the letters of the alphabet is supposed to constitute the great check on the forger, but we think we see far greater difficulties in the way of this pest to society than that the forger would not only have to engrave his own die and cast his own blocks, not only have to find his own drilling-machine—not his least difficulty—but he would have to make his own paper, and even his own ink. If we look at the back of our postage-stamps, we will find that each die has been struck on a piece of paper bearing the mark of a crown, impressed on the paper as a water-mark at the time of its manufacture. The ink also with which postage-stamps are printed differs from ordinary printers' ink, not only in colour, but in being soluble in water. More, however, than even its execution, the fact of the stamp being a government article, and only obtainable in any large quantity from the Stamp or Post offices, makes any attempt on the part of the forger to put a spurious article into circulation exceedingly difficult. Stamps, while they do duty for coin, are used almost exclusively for small transactions, and generally among people well known to each other.

When postage-stamps were first introduced in England, it was little thought that they would become a medium of exchange, and far less that they would excite such a *furore* among stamp-collectors. The same stamp may do duty in a number of ways before it comes to be affixed to a letter, to have its countenance disfigured, and then transported for miles away. It may have been previously used in discharge of some small debt, or sent to pay a charitable subscription. The advertising columns of a newspaper will shew the reader many of the thousand and one ways in which he may turn his spare postage-stamps to account. Therein some public benefactor promises to reveal a secret that will bring its happy possessor within reach of an easy competence, for the small acknowledgment of half-a-crown's worth of stamps. Thirteen Queen's heads will secure you exemption from all the ills that flesh is heir to. 'Send a dozen stamps' says another, 'and a specimen of your handwriting, and the advertiser will disclose to you the mysteries of your own mind and capabilities, and will put you in a position to make the most of the faculties you possess.' For the same quantity of stamps, another will tell you who will win the Derby, 'as surely as if you stood at the winning-post on the very day.' 'Stable Boy' promises all subscribers of twelve stamps that if they 'do not win on this event, he will never put his name in print again.' Of course, all this is quackery, or worse; but the reader needs not to be told how in an immense number of *bona-fide* cases the system of postage-stamp remittances is exceedingly handy for both buyer and vendor, and how trade is fostered by it. As a social arrangement for the poorer classes especially, we could not well overestimate its usefulness. While the use of postage-stamps in this way has never been discouraged, and even owned to be useful, as a means of helping to put a stop to the transmission of coin in letters, the Post-office authorities have recently made provision for taking postage-stamps from the public, when such stamps are not soiled or not in single stamps. This arrangement is already in force at the principal post-offices in the country, and will ultimately extend to all. The commission charged on these exchanges is at the rate of sixpence in the pound. In America, as the reader will remember, postage-stamps have formed the principal currency of small value, since the breaking out of the present fratricidal war. Recently, the United

States government has issued the stamps without gum, as it was found inconvenient to pass them frequently from hand to hand, after they had undergone the gelatinising process. Under a recent act, 'Postage Currency, July 17, 1862,' the Federal authorities have issued stamps printed on larger-sized paper, with directions for their use under existing circumstances.

Most of our readers will have heard something of stamp-collecting, but few will be aware of the extent to which the *timbromanie*, or stamp-mania, has been carried. The scenes in Birch Lane last year, where crowds congregated nightly, to the exceeding annoyance and wonderment of policeman X—where ladies and gentlemen of all ages and all ranks, from cabinet-ministers to crossing-sweepers, were busy, with album or portfolio in hand, buying, selling, or exchanging, are now known to have been the beginnings of what may almost be termed a new trade. Postage-stamp exchanges are now common enough; one held in Lombard Street on Saturday afternoons is largely attended. Looking the other day in the advertisement pages of a monthly magazine, we counted no fewer than sixty different dealers in postage-stamps there advertising their wares. Twelve months ago, there was no regular mart in London at which foreign stamps might be bought; now, there are a dozen regular dealers in the metropolis, who are doing a profitable trade. Within the last few months, we have witnessed the establishment of a monthly organ for the trade; and in the second number of the *Stamp-collector's Magazine*, the publishers are moved to say that its success 'has far exceeded their most sanguine expectations.' England is not the only country interested in stamp-collecting. As might be expected, the custom originated in France, and has prevailed there for a number of years. In the gardens of the Tuilleries, and also to some extent in those of the Luxembourg, crowds still gather, principally on Sunday afternoons, and may be seen sitting under the trees, sometimes in a state of great excitement, as they busily sell or exchange any of their surplus stock for some of which they may have been in search. The gathering of a complete set of postage-stamps, and a proper arrangement of them, is at least a harmless and innocent amusement. On this point, however, we prefer, in conclusion, to let Dr Gray, of the British Museum, speak,* and our readers to judge for themselves. 'The use and charm of collecting any kind of object is to educate the mind and the eye to careful observation, accurate comparison, and just reasoning on the differences and likenesses which they present, and to interest the collector in the design or art shewn in their creation or manufacture, and the history of the country which produces or uses the objects collected. The postage-stamps afford good objects for all these branches of study, as they are sufficiently different to present broad outlines for their classification; and yet some of the variations are so slight that they require minute examination and comparison to prevent them from being overlooked. The fact of obtaining stamps from so many countries, suggests to ask what were the circumstances that induced the adoption, the history of the countries which issue them, and the understanding why some countries (like France) have considered it necessary, in so few years, to make so many changes in the form or design of the stamp used, while other countries, like Holland, have never made the slightest change.'

'The changes referred to all mark some historical event of importance—such as the accession of a new king, a change in the form of government, or the absorption of some smaller state into some larger one; a change in the currency, or some other revolution. Hence, a collection of postage-stamps may be considered, like a collection of coins, an epitome of the

* Hand-catalogue of Postage-stamps, introduction, pp. 5 and 6.

history of Europe and America for the last quarter of a century; and at the same time, as they exhibit much variation in design and in execution, as a collection of works of art on a small scale, shewing the style of art of the countries that issue them. The size of the collection, and the manner in which they are arranged and kept, will shew the industry, judgment, neatness, and taste of the collector.' Thus, says another authority, 'the stamps of the period will be indelible records that Parma, Modena, and Tuscany once had independent rulers of their own; they will mark the revolts of Schleswig-Holstein and the Romagna; exhibit the transfer of Luxembourg from Holland to Belgium. When North and South America are parcelled out into kingdoms, like Europe in our days, they will testify to the pre-existence of New Granada, and the Argentine Confederation, &c., as republics; shew the phases of French government, from Republic to Presidency, and thence to Empire; and record to remotest generations that the Grecian islands owned, in days long past, the sway of the British queen, Victoria, for postal amateurs are already on the *qui vive* in anticipation of another series of Ionians, under a change of régime.'

MR BOWEN'S HOUSE-WARMING.

'Are you going to the Bowens' theatricals next week, Amy?' asked Kitty.

'Am I *going*?' repeated Amy. 'Why, my dear Kitty, I am going to *act*.'

Kitty's aunt, Miss Tapper, gave a start and an hysterical shudder; Mrs Flitt said: 'Indeed!' and Mrs General Gore said: 'Going to act, are you?'

'I should so like to go,' said Kitty; 'I have been asked, and I think papa will let me. I've never seen a play in my life, you know.'

'I suppose you are aware that it's wicked?' said Miss Tapper, in a sepulchral voice.

'Wicked! Miss Tapper,' cried Amy; 'what's wicked?'

'Playacting's wicked,' replied Miss Tapper solemnly.

'Why, what is there wicked about it?' asked Amy.

'Everything's wicked about it,' said Miss Tapper peremptorily. 'Plays are wicked; curtains are wicked; dresses are wicked; scenery's wicked; footlights are wicked; and it's a wicked world.'

'Hear! hear!' cried Kitty's brother, Joe. 'Well done, aunt. Green baize is wicked; pictures are wicked; candles are wicked; and—what was the other? Oh, dresses are wicked—so long live the noble savage, and death to the tailors.'

'Don't, Joe,' said Kitty.

'Oh, pray don't stop him, dear,' said Miss Tapper; 'you know you agree with him. But it doesn't matter: truth is great, and will prevail, and insult is not argument.'

'Nay, aunt!' cried Joe. 'Didn't I agree with everything you said? Didn't I agree with you that the stage is wicked? I'll prove it, too. It's a wicked world; good! all the world's a stage; good: therefore the stage must be wicked; Q. E. D.'

'Ah! never mind,' returned Miss Tapper, in that irritating tone peculiar to martyrs; 'I can bear it. Scoffs fall harmless when directed against truth. Sneers won't make playacting right, or my opinion wrong: acting's wicked. Reflect upon what I have been saying, Amy, and I think you'll give up your intention. But at anyrate, remember, if anything dreadful happens, I've warned you.' And Miss Tapper rose and left the room.

'I quite agree with Miss Tapper,' said Mrs Flitt; 'that is to say, I very nearly agree with her. Play-acting is wicked.'

'Why, Mrs Flitt,' urged Amy, 'I once acted charades at your own house.'

'Charades, my dear—yes!' returned Mrs Flitt. 'There's no harm in charades: there's no harm in a few shawls, and a feather or two. One wears a feather in one's bonnet out-of-doors sometimes, so why shouldn't one do the same indoors? and if one may wear a shawl in the street, I suppose one may in the house. Then as to what is said: I suppose there is nothing wrong in fancying one's self some one else for a few minutes, and trying to provide language for such and such a person, or to suit such and such an occasion. I must say I think, myself, it is a very good intellectual exercise. There is no harm in that; no. The harm is when one takes regular plays, and sits down and regularly learns them, and then says them off by heart like a regular actor; and when one has a curtain, just as they do in a regular theatre'—

'But you had a screen, Mrs Flitt,' said Amy; 'and by pulling it out, and closing it again, you made it answer all the purposes of a curtain.'

'A screen, my dear!' returned Mrs Flitt, in a tone of injured innocence, as if it was rather hard to impute wickedness to a screen—a screen! But what's a screen? One uses a screen in daily life. If it's not wicked to use a screen in one part of the room, it's not in another. A screen does not draw up and let down. Why, I have seen a screen made use of in a church. No; there is no harm in that. It is when one goes further, when one has a regular curtain that draws up and lets down, and footlights, and all those kinds of things—it is then that you overstep the bounds of moderation, and trespass upon the ground of impropriety. I take liberal views about these matters; I don't like to see young people brought up so strictly as to think everything wrong; but, believe me, my dear, a screen is the limit; further than that it is not right to go. So, if the Bowens are going to have anything more than a screen, and a few feathers, and one or two innocent things of that kind, have nothing to do with it, my dear Amy. Have you chosen your words, or would any suggestions of mine be of use to you? "Charitable" is a good word. "Chary," explained Mrs Flitt, "and "table." Then the whole—"charitable"—is quite easy, you know.'

'But, Mrs Flitt,' said Amy, slowly and cautiously, 'the fact is that we are not—not going to act charades; we are going to act—*Hamlet*.'

'Oh, my goodness!' said Mrs Flitt, for the moment quite overcome—oh, my goodness! Dear me! I did not know it was so late.' And making her adieux rather hastily, Mrs Flitt took her departure, with all the best feelings of her nature sadly disturbed.

'I must say, Kitty,' said Mrs General Gore, as she rose to go, soon afterwards—'I must say I think both your aunt and Mrs Flitt take rather too strict a view of the matter. For my part, I candidly confess I can't see the harm of acting real plays. If there is no harm in trying yourself to supply words to suit a particular character upon a particular occasion, I can't see the harm in another person doing the same. And, upon my word, if it's not wrong to compose the conversations, I don't think it can be wrong to write them down; and if it's correct to write them down, I feel certain that it can't be wrong to make use of them afterwards. Now, don't you agree with me?'

'Entirely,' cried Amy and Kitty.

'Mrs Gore, you speak like a book,' said Joe.

'Then really,' continued Mrs General Gore, encouraged by the applause, 'I could not quite agree with the conclusion at which Mrs Flitt arrived about the curtain. What is a curtain? Dear me!—to take one of Mrs Flitt's own arguments—if I may use a curtain in one part of the room, mayn't I in another? And what difference does it make, morally, whether a thing draws up and lets down, or unfolds?' Then if, as Mrs Flitt says, we may use a screen, because she has seen a screen used in church—oh, how blind bigotry makes us!—for the same reason, we may use a curtain, because they use curtains in church. Yes, I must say I think people look at these little things too seriously—much too seriously. Don't you think so too?'

'I quite agree with everything you've said,' cried Amy.

'And so do I,' said Kitty.

'So do I,' said Joe. 'People take a few of these trifles, invest them with an importance to which they have no right, make them in their own minds types of sin, and because you don't look at them in the same light, because you look at them with your own eyes—not through their coloured spectacles—you are set down as an irreclaimable sinner. Why, what are curtains, scenery, footlights, but?'

'Stop, Mr Joseph—stop!' cried Mrs General Gore. 'You said footlights. Now, footlights I strongly object to. Yes, I draw the line at footlights. I quite agree with your aunt and Mrs Flitt that footlights are wicked; I can't even think of them without a shudder. If I hear of footlights being used at private theatricals, I say to myself at once: "There is something wrong with the master of that house."

'But, Mrs Gore,' said Joe laughing, 'if we may use candles in one part of a room, why mayn't we in another?'

'Oh, Mr Joseph,' replied Mrs General Gore, 'don't speak in that light and jesting way about a serious, a very serious subject! There is a moral sense within me, my dear friends, that tells me what is right and what is wrong; and at the very mention of footlights, this moral sense starts up and pricks me, by that means telling us as plainly as possible that footlights are wicked. Besides,' added Mrs Gore triumphantly, 'you never saw footlights in church. Oh, my dear Amy, if the Bowens are going to have footlights, don't consent to act—don't, I beseech you.'

'Well,' said Joe, when Mrs Gore was gone, 'for a woman like my aunt, who declares she was against plays and everything connected with them, I have some respect; but for a woman who can swallow a screen and strain at a curtain, or swallow a curtain and strain at a candle, I have no respect at all.'

'Nor I,' said Amy, pulling out her acting edition. 'Come and hear me my Ophelia, Kitty, will you?'

Yes, the Bowens were going to act *Hamlet*. Mr Bowen, senior, who had been an ironmonger, and was now a gentleman, had from his earliest youth been impressed with the idea that he was gifted with histrionic powers of no common order. As iron had been the business, theatricals had been the pleasure of his life; not that he had ever as yet appeared upon any boards, but he had been diligently educating himself for an occasion of the kind by a constant attendance at the theatre, by an earnest study of plays in general, and of Shakspeare's in particular, and by carefully cultivating the acquaintance of all the members of the profession that he had had the good-fortune to meet. That day was a white day in the annals of the Bowens when Stalker, the great tragedian, took an early dinner with them before proceeding to rehearsal. Stalker's great characters were the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and the Duke in *Othello*. Long dwelt that evening in the memory of the Bowens,

when Scorley, the comedian, supped with them after the performance; Scorley, the pet and pride of the London theatres—on the Surrey side of the river. Many people would tell you that a man with propensities of this kind would never succeed in life as an ironmonger, but this would be a mistake. Mr Bowen never allowed his pleasures to interfere with his business, and he had succeeded so well, that at the age of fifty he was able to retire with a large fortune, an extensive library of dramatic works, and profound conviction, the result of long study, that the character of Laertes had never as yet been done justice to, and, till he undertook it, never would be. After his retirement, Mr Bowen went through the usual stages in the opinion of the local society: the ironmonger dissolved into the retired tradesman; the retired tradesman into the person with property; and when he took the large house in Morley Street, he was considered fairly to have earned the title of gentleman, and was visited accordingly.

This house in Morley Street Mr Bowen had not taken without an eye to its suitableness for an amateur theatre. From the front-door, you passed through a lobby into a large hall that occupied a great part of the front of the house: at one end of this hall was breakfast-room; at the other, a dining-room. Opposite the door of the lobby was the door that opened into the servants' part of the house; and answering to this, at the other end of the hall, was the door by which you gained the staircase that led to the drawing-room.

'Now,' thought Mr Bowen, as he surveyed this hall previous to taking the house, 'how will this do for a theatre? Cut the hall into two with your curtain. Well! Make the front-door end your stage, and you have the breakfast-room for your green-room. Well! The other half is for your audience, with the dining-room for supper-room. Excellent! I'll take the house,' said Mr Bowen.

The only objection to this arrangement was, that any one entering the house from the front-door must come upon the stage; but as between the door and the hall there was the lobby, where a servant could be stationed, this did not so much matter.

Of course, Mrs Bowen's first thought, when they were comfortably settled in the house, was a house-warming. This suggestion was eagerly caught at by Stanley Bowen, the eldest son, who inherited his father's theatrical tastes, and was possessed of a voice so powerful, that at college it had gained for him the nickname of Bowen-erges.

'House-warming by all means,' said Stanley; 'and let's celebrate it with private theatricals.'

'My idea exactly,' cried Mr Bowen, rising solemnly; 'and I'll be Laertes.'

So the Bowens were going to act *Hamlet*. It was impossible to pass the house without seeing that something was wrong. You can always tell by the look of a house whether any one is dead, or has just been born, or is just going to be married; and in the same way you can tell by the look of a house if private theatricals are impending. It was plain enough in this case, at anyrate. Carpenters were constantly going in and out; through the windows, you could see that the hall was divided by a curtain; lamps were lighted in broad daylight; and the shutters of one of the hall-windows were kept closed. A hatchment could not be plainer.

But if the house from the outside betrayed that there were going to be private theatricals, the moment you set foot inside it, that fact, and the additional fact of *Hamlet* being the play selected, became painfully clear. Through the lobby-door, you hear a gentleman abusing his mother at the top of his voice, and using the most dreadful language to convey an idea of the very low opinion he has of his uncle.

"A murderer and a villain!" cries Mr Stanley

Bowen; "a slave, that is not twentieth part the size of your precedent lord."

"Tythe," "tythe"—not "size," says Tom Bowen, the prompter, and the company laugh.

"I wish you would not interrupt me, Tom," says the manager severely. Stanley had been elected manager, because, having once acted at college, he was supposed to have some practical knowledge of stage business.

"But you said "size" instead of "tythe,"" replies Tom mildly.

"Well, could you not tell me of it afterwards? How is a fellow ever to get well into a part, if he's to be checked and pulled up every minute about paltry mistakes of that kind? Where was I? What's the cue?"—in a voice of thunder—"Can't you give me the cue?"

"Precedent lord," says Tom.

"Of your precedent lord," continues Hamlet; "a vice of kings: cut-throat of the empire and the rule, that from a shelf the precious"—

"It isn't 'cut-throat,'" is it Tom?" asks the Queen.

"No; it's 'cut-purse,'" replies Tom.

"Then why didn't you tell me so?" says Bowenerges furiously.

"You told me not to interrupt you," answers Tom.

"What are you standing there with the book in your hand for?" demands the manager with an awful affectation of calmness.

"To prompt, of course," says Tom; "but"—

"Then why don't you prompt?" yells Bowenerges.

"Why don't I? Because"—

"A cut-purse of the empire and the rule," shouts Bowenerges, drowning the answer, "that from a shelf the precious diadem stole, and put it in his pocket!"

Queen. "No more!"

Hamlet. "A king of shreds and patches:—Save me, and"—Hang me! says the manager, abruptly deserting the text; "if that Ghost is not gone now. Where is he?"

"Run and tell him, will you?" says Tom to one of the company; "he's playing billiards with Johnson."

"Of course, it was quite out of your power to send for him before," says Stanley with a sneer. "It was too much to expect of you, that, of course."

"Hang it," says Tom, "a fellow can't do everything. Some one else ought to!"

"How on earth, Jones," says the manager angrily to the Ghost, who comes running in—utterly unlike a Ghost in everything except in being quite out of breath—"how on earth can we rehearse properly, if you keep running away and playing the fool in this idiotic manner? If I'd known you were going to treat us like this, I'd have given the part to some one else."

"You'd better give it to some one else now," retorts Jones. "I'm not particularly anxious!"

"Do you not come?" says Bowen, striking in, to prevent the end of the sentence—"Do you not come your tardy son to chide?"

"No, by Jove!" says Jones promptly; "I think it's quite the other way."

"As it is impossible that the piece can ever go off well," says Stanley, after a pause, in order to enable him to command his feelings, "considering the state of mind of some of the actors, my advice is to give it up at once."

"All right," says Jones, with an air of assumed carelessness. "I second the motion. Let's give it up, by all means."

"To study the character of Hamlet with any chance of success," continues the manager, a little more warmly, "requires a mind free from care and annoyance. As some persons—with a severe look at Jones and the unhappy prompter—have apparently determined that I shall not enjoy that freedom, I

shall give up the part. I feel that I can't do it justice."

"We have long shared your feelings," rejoins Jones, in a tone of mock sympathy.

"Confound it, sir!" shouts Bowenerges, losing all patience.

"Boys, boys," exclaims a voice from behind the playbill. His timely interference, and the united entreaties of the rest of the company, with some difficulty effect a reconciliation between the contending parties, and the rehearsal is resumed.

This voice belongs to Laertes, who is in France, or rather in the green-room, correcting the proof-sheet of the playbill. His timely interference, and the united entreaties of the rest of the company, with some difficulty effect a reconciliation between the contending parties, and the rehearsal is resumed.

So things went on, till the important day arrived, which was from morning to night a day of rehearsals and wretchedness. No one seemed to know his part; the byplay was all wrong; Bowenerges stormed; Jones sneered; Mr Bowen made peace, and Mrs Bowen pastry; and everything seemed upside down, inside out, and all in a tangle.

The company was called by the manager for a rehearsal at ten, for an early dinner at half-past one, and for a rehearsal again at three. The morning rehearsal was troublesome and tiring enough; but the afternoon rehearsal, when the actors wanted to digest in comfort, was a most melancholy and sulky affair indeed. Jones confided to each one of the company separately—the manager excepted—that if any gentleman or lady then present ever caught him (Jones) acting in private theatricals again, they might consider themselves at liberty to skin him and eat him on the spot. To do the company justice, none of them betrayed any eagerness to avail themselves of the permission, should the opportunity ever occur; and when the communication was made to Mr Bowen, senior, he rather resented it than otherwise, advising Jones, in a gruff voice, to learn his part. Jones, with great politeness, offered at once to say his part, if Mr Bowen could conveniently find time to hear him. As Mr Bowen rejected this proposal with some disdain, Jones retired into the green-room, and went to sleep upon the sofa. The lighting up of the stage, however, roused the company, and restored their cheerfulness. The afternoon lethargy passed off; the excitement of the coming event cast its shadow before; and as scene after scene was finally passed in review, the effects were so striking, that the actors were enthusiastic in their praises, and even Jones forgot to sneer.

"It seems to me, Jones," said the manager, in a satisfied voice, "that that first scene ought to be effective."

"It's sure to be," replied Jones.

"I expect to hear the audience shudder when you come on, Jones," continued the manager.

"I'll make them shudder," said Jones confidently. "I shall come on with a rush, and startle them."

This remark was received in silence.

"I shall operate upon them like a shower-bath," added Jones, lost in his own pleasing reflections.

The manager tried to look at this in the light of a joke, and laughed faintly.

"A sudden clap of thunder in the dead of night will be nothing to me," continued Jones, working his body about, as if to ascertain that his muscles were in good order.

"Dignity, Jones—dignity," said the manager, in a serious voice.

"Dignity's all very well in its way," returned Jones; "but the thing in acting a ghost is to produce a terrible impression at once. Now, suddenness!"

"You don't mean to say seriously that you intend to come bounding on to the stage like the clown in a pantomime, do you?"

"No, I don't," replied Jones, in an icy tone. "May I

ask what induced you to put such an absurd question to me?

'What do you mean by saying you shall come on with a rush, then? No, my dear fellow,' continued the manager, employing that friendly term in the hope of preserving peace, 'to make them shudder, you must.'

'Imitate your Hamlet,' said the irascible Jones, rejecting the olive.

'It's my belief that the audience will be in fits of laughter at your folly, before I ever shew my face,' cried Bowenerges, laying himself open, in his eagerness to get a hit at his adversary.

'Your face will do it, certainly, if I don't,' retorted Jones, promptly availing himself of the opening.

'There's the first carriage,' exclaimed Tom Bowen, and a precipitate retreat was made into the green-room.

Yes, the company were beginning to arrive, sure enough. Carriage after carriage set down its freight; and amongst the earliest arrivals—spite of Aunt Tapper's forebodings, spite of Mrs Flitt's warnings, and spite of Mrs General Gore's affectionate entreaties—came Miss Kitty.

'So you are going to this—this playacting, Kitty?' said Aunt Tapper.

'Yes, aunt,' replied Kitty, looking—bless her!—in her innocent pink and white, as if she were not going upon any very wicked expedition 'yes, aunt, I'm going.'

'Very good,' said Miss Tapper. 'Then all I have to say is this: if the floor gives way, or if the roof comes down, or if the carriage is overset, don't say it's my fault.'

Now, as it was not in the least likely that Kitty would charge any accident of this kind on her aunt, the probability is, that Miss Tapper meant, 'If any of these things happen, mind it's your fault.' However, Kitty only answered meekly: 'No, aunt,' and went rejoicing to the party, where she passed the time till the play began in observing, with the greatest interest, the footlights and the curtain, and in thinking how very nervous Amy must be on the other side of it.

At eight o'clock the curtain drew up, and Kitty's delighted eyes beheld Francisco leaning on a spear, and looking nervously towards the front-door. To him Bernardo entered, and, after a word or two, Francisco, either through nervousness or cold—for it was a cold night, you remember—dropped his spear, which was within a quarter of an inch of taking Bernardo's eyeball with it in its fall. Bernardo, with extraordinary agility, avoided the spear, and with, Kitty thought, still greater courtesy restored the weapon to Francisco. An apology (not in the part) was hurriedly made, and Horatio and Marcellus entered; and after Horatio had explained that he did not believe in the Ghost a bit, the Ghost appeared, and dispelled Horatio's incredulity instantly. Jones was perfect. His attitudes were the most weird and horrible that could be imagined. Such an effect did he produce, that, on his second entrance, he was loudly applauded, and though, perhaps, it was a little mistake to bow his acknowledgments, yet he instantly dissipated any feelings of levity that this bow might have occasioned, by a motion or two so ghastly, that if purgatory can be expressed by two stamps and a twist of a truncheon, Jones certainly expressed it.

As the play continued, Kitty's delight increased. Though she had never seen *Hamlet* acted before, yet she had read it, of course, and here it all was before her. There was Polonius; and there was that wicked King that she detested so; and there was the Queen; and there Laertes—rather too stout, perhaps, for so elegant a cavalier, but evidently painfully anxious to look as thin as possible, and as far as acting was concerned, all, nay, even more than could be desired—and oh! here was Hamlet. Mr Bowen's Laertes was characterised by an overpowering melancholy, to which, when his speech was over, he drew attention

by groaning at intervals, and by periodically putting a handkerchief to the whites of his eyes. The reason for this he had imparted to Jones. He felt certain that, however much Laertes wished to go to France, he could not leave his friends and his native country without regret, 'though,' added Mr Bowen, 'this feeling would doubtless work off in a day or two.' Of Mr Stanley Bowen's Hamlet I need say no more than that it was decidedly pre-Fechterite, and that his leading idea in representing the Prince appeared to be to shut his eyes and shout loud. And so the play proceeded, the audience applauding heartily, the actors warming to their parts, and the whole thing going on gloriously, when, in the second act, an unforeseen accident occurred, that ruined everything. Imagine the feelings of the traveller who, biting the desert apple, sends his teeth into a mass of sand; of the somnambulist who, after dreaming he is walking in the land of Beulah, awakes upon the area railings; of the actor who, turning to greet Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, grasps the hands of—two firemen.

'Who are you?' cries Hamlet.

'I'm the brigade,' answers the first fireman.

'And I'm the parish,' says the second.

'And what do you want here?' inquires Hamlet angrily.

'You don't appear to be aware, sir,' says the brigade, 'that your kitchen chimney's on fire.'

'Kitchen chimney on fire!' exclaims Hamlet.

'Blazin' most awful,' says the parish.

'What's to be done, then?' asks the manager, for the moment quite overcome by the calamity.

'Why, if you ain't anxious for the house to be burned down, the sooner you lets us get to the kitchen, the better,' replies the brigade.

'Which it's also my sentiments,' says the parish.

'What an awful disaster!' murmurs Hamlet, and audience and actors join in the lament, the Queen exhibiting hysterical tendencies of such uncommon violence, that Jones hints to the parish that it would be only kind to play upon her before proceeding to the kitchen.

'Don't you be afraid, mum,' says the brigade; 'we shall be able to stop it, if it ain't gone too far.'

'If it ain't gone too far,' repeats the parish; 'but there's no known.'

'Then, why don't you go down at once?' shouts Bowenerges.

'All right, sir,' says the brigade; 'we're goin'. We should have been there some time ago, if you'd not kep us, asking questions.'

'Delays, in these cases, is very dangerous,' adds the parish.

Exeunt two firemen.

'I'm sure we had better stop the play,' says Ophelia.

'Nothing of the kind,' returns the manager, rousing himself—'nothing of the kind;' and turning to the audience, he apologised for the interruption, said that there was nothing to be afraid of; that the fire would easily be extinguished by the firemen and the servants; hoped that the play might now proceed; and concluded, rather unaply, by saying that he would endeavour to prove that the fire had not damped his energies. The play proceeded accordingly, the audience paying little attention to what was going on, and the actors, with the exception of Bowenerges himself, appearing utterly demoralised.

Now, to act Hamlet at all is a very difficult thing, but to act it when the chimney is on fire, is simply impossible. Could any amount of enthusiasm carry an actor through the part when, in his best scenes, he is interrupted in such a way as this? The scene with Ophelia is just finishing; Hamlet bids her 'to a nunney go,' and turning sharply to rush off, comes into collision with a chimney-sweeper, who is going to sweep the chimney, accompanied by a friend who is going to see him do it.

'Hollo, master!' says the sweep in an encouraging voice, supposing that the unhappy Bowen is fleeing from the conflagration; 'you've no call to run away. We shall put you out quite easy.'

'You've done that already,' says the miserable manager.

How long things might have gone on in this way, there is no saying, but fortunately a fireman, putting his head up the chimney, gave it as his opinion that the house was catching. A terrified housemaid instantly rushed up stairs, communicated the intelligence in a voice of horror, and then took the stage, weeping hysterically. Whether the house was catching or not, the panic that this news occasioned was very catching indeed. The audience rose with wonderful unanimity, opera-cloaks and hats were scrambled for, handkerchiefs were tied round heads, and in a remarkably short space of time the street before Mr Bowen's house was filled with people in evening-dresses, hurrying off as best they could to their several homes.

The manager stood for a minute regarding the deserted theatre, and then made his way down stairs to the scene of the disaster. The chimney was being doused with water by some one on the roof; the chimney-sweeper was standing on the hearth with his instruments ready; the two firemen were talking together like doctors in consultation; and a policeman was leaning with his hand on the mantel-piece, as if he were feeling the patient's pulse.

'Is it going out?' asked Stanley.

'I think we're getting it under,' said the brigade encouragingly.

'But it may break out afresh,' added the parish, with a warning shake of the head.

'You don't think that the house will catch now, do you?' inquired Bowen.

'No fear of that,' replied the brigade.

'Unless there's a beam in the chimney,' said the parish, 'which I've known about such cases.'

'Hang it! I wish the governor would come back,' muttered Stanley. 'Where can he be all this time?'

Yes, where could Mr Bowen, senior, be all this time? Why, the fact was, that in the interval between the first and second acts, Ophelia was suddenly observed to express great consternation, and after a hurried search, was heard to use these awful words: 'There, I've left them at home.'

'Left what at home?' inquired a dozen anxious voices.

'The flowers that I have to distribute when I'm mad,' said Amy, almost ready to cry; 'and I prepared them so carefully.'

'I'll send a servant for them at once,' said the manager.

'A servant would never find them,' replied Amy; 'and he'd be sure to make some mistake.'

'I'll go for them myself,' volunteered old Mr Bowen. 'You know I shall not be wanted till the fourth act. So give me careful directions, and I'll just change my dress and go.'

'But are you sure there will be time?' asked Amy.

'Plenty of time,' replied the manager, 'if he goes at once.'

The good-natured Mr Bowen started off on his errand in high spirits, for the play so far had gone off capitally, and there was every prospect of a triumphant evening. In the fulness of his pleasure, he gave little jumps as he hurried along, and whenever he drew near a lamp, the passers-by were astonished at the number of dimples that kept rising to the surface of his countenance, as bubbles do in very dirty water.

Well, he reached Amy's house, secured the flowers with less trouble than he expected, refused the offer of a servant to carry them for him, and set off jubilant as ever on his return. 'My Laertes is a hit—quite a

hit,' he said half aloud. 'There's nothing like carefully studying a character—nothing. Stanley's Hamlet surprises me. Upon my word, I've seen a good many Hamlets, but I don't remember one that I like better than his. It has more than Kean's polish, with more than Brook's'—

'Fire!' shouted a small boy, tearing along past him.

'Just so,' said Mr Bowen, highly pleased: 'the very word I was going to use. Very curious and funny indeed.'

'Fire! fire!' shouted several more boys.

'There appears to be a fire somewhere,' reflected Mr Bowen. 'Hurrah! Fire! fire!'

'Is it far off?' one boy asked another.

'No; it's just round there,' was the reply.

'That's right,' commented Mr Bowen, if possible in higher spirits than ever; 'for I could not have gone much further, and I should like just to get a glance at it. This is really amusing. Fire! Hurrah! fire!' and he began to run.

'Fire! What street, Bill?' cried a newspaper boy to a friend.

'Morley Street.'

'Hollo!' said Mr Bowen, slackening his pace. 'My street! That's not so pleasant, though.'

'Whose house is it, Bill?' inquired the newspaper boy.

'Old Bowen's,' was the answer.

Old Bowen stopped for a second, thunderstruck; the next moment, dashing forward with a rapidity astonishing in a man of his figure, he seized the boy by the collar, and asked breathlessly: 'Whose house is it?'

'Old Bowen's,' replied the boy, surprised at the earnestness of the question.

'Who's old Bowen?' said that gentleman, in his agitation scarcely knowing what he said.

'Who's old Bowen?' repeated the boy, breaking away; 'why, old Bowen, the ironmonger as was, of course;' and as if to illustrate this explanation, he gave, as he ran on, a remarkably correct vocal imitation of the sharpening of a saw.

There was no longer any room for doubt; and when he entered Morley Street, the appearance of two engines and a large crowd about the door of his house only made assurance doubly sure. He pushed his way through the people, entered the house, and as he crossed the stage, encountered Jones, who, true to his ghostly character, still haunted the scene.

'Where's the fire?' asked old Bowen.

'Kitchen chimney,' replied Jones shortly.

'Will the house catch?' inquired the master anxiously.

'Who knows?' answered the Ghost solemnly.

'Where's the audience?' asked the deserted host.

'Fled,' said the spectre in a gloomy voice.

'And the actors, are they gone too?'

'Ay,' answered the Ghost in the same tone.

'And the supper—has no one had any?'

'No,' replied Jones moodily; 'then added with more cheerfulness: 'By the way, I forgot that; the supper, to be sure;' and instantly vanished in the direction of the supper-room, as if determined not to fast in fires at anyrate.

Old Bowen muttered something that sounded very like 'Greedy beast!' and was hurrying towards the kitchen, when he met Stanley.

'What a time you've been,' said Stanley; 'however, it's all over now.'

'The fire's out, is it?' asked old Bowen, much relieved.

'Yes sir,' said one of the firemen, who was just passing on his way to the door; 'the fire's out, and the parish will come round in the morning.'

'What does he mean by the parish coming round in the morning?' asked Bowenerges.

'Means that I shall have to pay for this precious

business,' said old Bowen, leading the way to the supper-room.

Here they found Mrs Bowen consoling herself with a good cry, and Jones consoling himself with a hearty supper.

'If you call this a house-warming, I don't,' said Mrs Bowen in a voice broken by sobs.

'And if you don't,' said old Bowen bitterly, for he was soured by disappointment—'I wonder what you would call a house-warming, for I don't see what you can have much more like it than a house on fire.'

'How is it you are home so early?' said Miss Tapper, meeting Kitty in the hall.

'Oh, aunt, I've been so disappointed,' replied Kitty. 'The chimney took fire, and—'

'I knew it,' said Miss Tapper, in a voice of the sincerest exultation—'I knew it. I'm very sorry—very sorry, indeed; but I knew how it would all end.'

'Surprised! not at all surprised,' said Mrs Flitt, when the news reached her. 'What else could any one expect, I wonder? What are curtains likely to lead to? I'm only surprised that the house was not burned down.'

'Ah!' said Mrs General Gore to her informant, 'sin brings its own punishment, and so do footlights.'

SEPULTURE.

It is of course among savage tribes that we meet with the most primitive modes of interment; the Esquimaux and other races around the Frozen Ocean never bury their dead, or at most merely cover them with the branches of shrubs. The natives of the Murray River and other parts of Australia elevate them among the branches of trees, or else upon a framework of sticks, raised upon four poles, leaving the body uncovered, a prey to the ravens and vultures. Suspended thus in mid-air, a little village of dead will sometimes be met with, whose putrefying carcasses contaminate the atmosphere for miles round, and oblige the settler, as a sanitary measure, to disregard this national freak of interment, cut down the corpses, and bury them in a proper fashion. Not unfrequently, the benighted traveller who has lost his road, seeking the shelter of some umbrageous tree, to protect him from the rain, unwittingly deposits his weary body at the foot of one of these aerial tombs, and safe from the dropping shower, is exposed all night long to a continued patter of what the daylight reveals to be maggots and decaying human remains. But these modern savages are not the only people who have adopted this singular mode of burial, for Herodotus tells us that the Colcheans disposed of their dead in like manner. The great difficulty seems always to be how to get rid of the remains.

Among the Parsees, who form such a large proportion of the inhabitants of China, the dead are admitted into a tower of great depth and circumference, at the bottom of which is a well. This tower is open at the top to the air, and allows of the entrance of birds of prey, who, attracted by the smell of the carion, gorge themselves with human flesh till the bones are left nearly bare. When, by the aid of these scavengers, and the natural process of decay, the body has been reduced to a skeleton, the friends of the deceased revisit the tower, and commit the remains of their departed friend to the well, which, being furnished with subterraneous passages, is mysteriously supposed to communicate with the other world, and afford an easy transit to the regions of the blessed. Among other modes of burial by simple exposure is

that followed by some of the inhabitants of Tibet, who, cutting up their deceased friend into quarters, carry the pieces up into the mountains, and there leave them, to be devoured by birds, or destroyed by natural influences.

Though exposure of the dead on the surface of the earth seems thus to have been not uncommon, we rarely read of their being committed to the waters, either of any large inland river or of the sea. The only instance in which we are aware of such form of burial being adopted as the usual custom, is that of the boatmen of the Indian rivers, who bury their dead by floating them on the surface of the water, and thus permit the stream to bear them along till they are either devoured by the alligators, or become stranded and torn in pieces by vultures and adjutants; before parting with the body, the attendants place a live-coal in the mouth, for the purpose, as they aver, of burning out the evil nature.

Inhumation would seem to have been practised from the earliest ages. Sometimes a cave was selected, such as that of Machpelah by Abraham; at others, vast catacombs were excavated under ground, where were deposited the sarcophagi and coffins containing the remains, and among savage tribes the more rude process was in vogue of merely digging out a hole, placing the body in it, and raising on it a mound or tumulus, which, as civilisation and wealth advanced, became supplanted by the marble tablet. Some select the sitting posture as the one most appropriate in which to bury their dead, others the standing, while the most common position of all is lying on the back. Nor do all savage tribes adopt the plan of removing their dead out of their sight, for we find that the natives of Sierra Leone not unfrequently bury their children in the floors of their houses, and the Soosoos, another African race, inter their dead in their streets.

The Egyptians seem to have been the first people who paid much attention to the burial of the dead, owing, no doubt, to their belief in the immortality of the soul, and its transmigration into the bodies of birds and other animals, till, after the lapse of a cycle of years, it returned to inhabit the human tenement which it had just quitted. To this end, therefore, is to be attributed the care which they took in forming proper places of sepulture, and embalming the body. As among other nations, the friends of the deceased put on mourning habits, and withdrew themselves for a period from all levity and enjoyment. There existed, however, among the ancient Egyptians, a custom now nowhere to be met with, and which most probably gave rise to the mythological story of Charon the ferryman and his boat conveying the dead across the Styx—that is, that when an Egyptian died, before his friends could inter him, they were obliged to submit him to a solemn judgment. This consisted in the ferrying of the dead across the lake of the district to which the deceased belonged. The friends of the departed having been summoned, they and the judges, usually forty in number, repaired to the lake, and stationed themselves on the further side, when the latter waited to hear if there was an accusation against the deceased. The attendants having placed the body, enclosed in a coffin, in the boat, which was under the care of a pilot, termed in the Egyptian Charon, the accusers, if any existed, who could charge the deceased with having led a wicked life, then stepped forward, and the accusation was listened to, and decided on by the judges. If no sin was laid to his charge, or if the statement proved to be false, the friends immediately changed their lamentations into expressions of joy and gladness, and extolled in high encomiums the virtues and good actions of the dead. If, on the contrary, it was

proved that he had spent his life in wickedness, the sentence was passed upon the deceased that he be deprived of burial. King and people were alike subject to this ordeal, and Diodorus Siculus tells us that several Egyptian sovereigns had been refused the rites of burial, due to the accusations brought against them by their subjects, and that fear of such an exposure exerted a wholesome effect on their life and actions. In embalming the dead, it was customary for the Egyptians to take out the entrails, and while praying for the deceased, to aver that if he had done any wickedness in his lifetime, it was through these (the entrails), which were then enclosed in a box, and thrown into the river, while the body was carefully preserved.

The burial customs of the Greeks resembled not a little those of the Egyptians and Romans; they, too, rolled themselves in the dust, covered themselves with ashes, beat their breasts, wounded themselves with their nails, tore off their hair, and threw it into the funeral-pile, and in many other ways manifested their sorrow.

The ancient Greeks placed a piece of money in the mouth of the deceased, as a fee to the pilot who was to convoy the body across the river Styx. They likewise furnished the body with a cake of bread, which was supposed to appease the wrath of Cerberus, door-keeper of the infernal regions.

Among the Romans, great attention was paid to preparing the body of the deceased for inhumation. Having been washed with warm water, the limbs were next anointed with aromatic salves, each member having its own particular unguent. After this the body was wrapped in fine black linen, or in a white toga, to which was superadded the ceremonial dress of the deceased, if he had been a person of note. A state couch was then prepared, and placed in the vestibule of the mansion, on which the body, laid with its feet towards the door, was allowed to remain a week, while preparations were going forward for the due performance of the ceremony. During these seven days, a *conclamatio*, or system of yelling and shouting, was kept up, in order that if the dead were only in a slumber, he might be wakened, while an altar was also erected by the side of the body, for the purpose of receiving the incense offered by friends. At the door were placed branches of the cypress or pine, according to the rank of the individual; and lest any robbery should occur, a sentinel was stationed to guard the body. As in a climate like that of Italy a body could not possibly be kept for a week without becoming very offensive, young boys were frequently employed to drive away the flies, naturally attracted by the decaying mass; and, unlike ourselves, the Romans chose the hour before sunrise as the one most suitable for interment, doubtless owing to the greater quietude and coolness of the city at that time. A herald having proclaimed the day of the funeral, also invited every one to be present; but generally only relatives attended, except where the deceased had been a person of note, and the public were anxious to pay their last tribute of respect to his memory. The bier, highly decorated and ornamented with flowers, according to the rank of the dead, was then carried forth, in order that its occupant might undergo the last process either of inhumation or cremation; but as the latter was a most expensive proceeding, it was reserved only for those of the wealthier classes.

Among the Mohammedans, funerals are conducted with great pomp under the special superintendence of the priests; but instead of allowing any time to elapse in ceremonies, no sooner is the faithful follower of the Prophet dead, than preparations are immediately made for his burial, that he may be detained as short time as possible on earth, nor be precluded from entering at once into the happiness of the blessed promised by Mohammed. Having washed the body

with milk and water, or water alone, and laid it on a bier on its right side, with the face uncovered, and the feet directed towards Mecca, the attendants, usually of the same sex as the deceased, hasten with it to the grave, the priest accompanying them, and calling on the dead three times, sometimes coupling with the name of the deceased that of his mother. Nor is there any lack of bearers, but all of every rank press forward in the endeavour to lend assistance, faithfully relying on the indulgence promised by the Prophet, that whosoever shall carry a dead body forty paces shall blot out a heinous sin.

It matters not to the good Mohammedan what may have been the cause of death, how infectious the corpse, or how contaminating the touch, but relying on the promise of the Prophet, and the blessing of Allah, he cheerfully lends a hand to carry his fellow-mortals to the grave. With a more extended interchange of human kindness, induced, no doubt, by the promise of reward hereafter, the good Mohammedan combines more resignation; and instead of wringing his hands, and giving vent to groanings and lamentations, he meekly accepts the bereavement as the will of Providence.

If, however, the Mohammedans think they cannot be too hasty in interring the dead, the Chinese again dwell over it with a tediousness and fastidiousness loathsome to our ideas, keeping the bodies of their friends as long as two years, in order that the obsequies may be performed with greater magnificence and detail. In consequence of this, a funeral forms, in Chinese household history, a landmark from which members of a family, and even subsequent generations, date their domestic records; nor can a son or an heir throw greater disregard on his predecessor than by conducting the funeral ceremonies in a parsimonious and careless manner. The Chinese must be a morbidly moralising race, for they love to ruminate for years before they die on the little tenement which is to be their long home, carefully fashioning and adorning it with their own hands, in proportion to the amount of their income, and placing it in a conspicuous part of the house, where they can feast their eyes on it. When the superstitious in our own country dream of coffins or funerals, they usually opine that some calamity is at hand; with how much more reason would they think so if some one were to forward them a coffin ticketed with their own name; but in China children often join together, and hoard up their little savings, to purchase a coffin for their father, which he, as the custom of his country, receives as an especial mark of filial affection, and points out exultingly to his guests as evidence of the regard in which he is held by his children.

When a Chinaman dies, his relatives cover his face with a handkerchief, to which the soul of the deceased is supposed to attach itself, and which is carefully preserved after his interment. The coffin, instead of being fastened with screws, is closed by some very adhesive pitch, and varnished outside, to prevent the emanation of any disagreeable odour. Besides the body of the occupant, there is usually enclosed as much food and clothing as is deemed sufficient for his use in the next world. The Chinese are exceedingly particular as to the place of sepulture, expending great sums on the purchase of some chosen spot, disposing sometimes of the whole landed property of the deceased, in order to enable them to raise sufficient money to give him a costly and superb burial. When at last the body is carried to its resting-place, the heir precedes it, having his head wrapped in a fagot of straw, and flinging himself on the ground, retarded the progress of the procession, as if by his actions he would still detain the departed a little longer.

But a Chinaman's regard for the dead continues long after they have been interred, and a traveller will often notice, on the beautiful hillsides selected for sepulture, relatives engaged burning incense and

sycce paper, while chanting hymns to the spirits of the departed. Great care is bestowed in keeping the tombs and surrounding ground in order, so long at least as survivors remain to pay attention to the sepulchre of their ancestors.

Buddha sometimes condescends to be present at the burial of the Chinese, but only at that of the priests, nor is he visible to all mortal eyes that may be there, but only to the high-priest. On such occasions, propitiatory offerings are made him, varying in worth according to the rank of the deceased, and a table spread with the good things of this life is laid out to appease the god's hunger. When the followers of the deceased are absent on some other part of the ceremony, the clothes, or whatever articles may have been offered, if worthless, are burnt, and the cakes, fruit, &c., disposed of by other than immortal beings, though put down to the credit of Buddha.

The Jews preserve many of the customs with which they were wont to bury their dead when masters of Jerusalem; instead, however, of rending their garments, the modern Jew merely cuts off a bit in token of affliction. The bending of the thumb into the hand, and retaining it in that posture with a string, is still followed, the Hebrew of our own time believing, as did his forefathers, that by giving the thumb of the dead the figure of the name of God, the devil would not dare to approach it. Those who follow the body do so barefooted, and throw dust on their heads, as emblematic of their sorrow. Of old, the wealthy Jew lavished large sums on the burial of the dead; as, for instance, Josephus tells us that Herod's body, when lying in state, was placed upon a couch, and covered with purple cloth. It was then transferred to a bier of solid gold, ornamented with precious stones, while the deceased ruler had a crown of the same metal placed on his head, and a sceptre in his right hand.

Cremation, or the burning of the dead, once greatly practised among the Greeks and Romans, is now entirely confined to some eastern nations. It was put down by the early Christians, who manifested much abhorrence at the custom, and invariably inhumed their dead; but though not now followed among civilised people, it has this powerful argument in its defence, that it is a much more healthy and decorous proceeding than that of cramming a city churchyard with ten times more dead than it will carry, till the surface of the ground has risen six or seven feet above its original level. Among the Greeks, the pile was lighted by the deceased's nearest friends, who, pouring libations of wine upon the burning mass, invoked the winds, by vows and prayers, to consume it as quickly as possible, while at the same time they called the dead by name. It was customary to add to the pile the clothes which had been recently worn by the deceased. The Romans followed a nearly similar plan, with this exception, that they occasionally cut off a finger of the dead, and after the body had been reduced to ashes, buried the remaining portion with further ceremonies. In either case, the ashes of the dead were subsequently collected, deposited in an urn, and placed in some conspicuous apartment of the house.

In the East, where cremation still constitutes one of the modes of disposing of the dead, the Siamese follow a method of their own. Having removed the intestines from the body, it is then placed upon a bier made of gilt wood, whilst tapers and perfumes are kept constantly burning round it. The pile, which is composed of precious woods, is kindled by the friends and family of the deceased, who, dressed in white, attend the funeral, while the sound of various instruments drowns the crackling of the fire, and serves, in Siamese opinions, to enhance the splendour of the ceremony. The whole eventually concludes with theatricals and other amusements.

Two-thirds of the natives of India burn the bodies

of the dead, and scatter the ashes on the Ganges or any other river they may live near, for which purpose the process of cremation is carried on on the banks of the stream. Among the Buddhist priesthood of China, of whom there are several divisions, the largest class burn their dead, and afterwards deposit the ashes in urns, carefully preserved in neat-looking temples, which are usually stationed on some hillside.

GHOSTS IN AUSTRALIA.

In the spring of 1851, I was employed in driving a numerous herd of store-cattle from New England down into the Melbourne country. The grass was plentiful, and the cattle travelled along at their leisure across the wide plains which lie between the Lachlan, Murrumbidgee, and Edward Rivers. It was nearly sunset on a fine evening in August when we came to Deniliquin, where the crossing-place of the last-named river is situated; and driving the cattle down into an angle of the Edward, we camped close to the foot of the sandhill on which the township is built. There were two or three other herds of cattle and some flocks of sheep waiting to cross in the morning, and as several of the men in charge of them went up to Billy McIntyre's public-house, and then came down to our camp-fire, there was soon a pretty large crowd of bushmen assembled round it. Some of them had brought bottles of rum from the inn, and as the grog circulated, we began to discuss the various routes by which we had travelled. There was a long argument as to the best track across the Old Man Plain; but, as almost all of us were in favour of that by Lang's Crossing-place, that point was almost settled, when an Australian stockman named Driscoll started what he seemed to consider an unanswerable objection, by asking us, how we would avoid the Black Swamp and the ghost of the 'trotting cob.' This speech was received with a roar of laughter; but Driscoll jumped up in a rage, and said: 'You may laugh as much as you like, boys; but as sure as I am standing here, I saw it myself, worse luck, and seeing's believing.' Of course, when we heard this, we were all anxious to hear the story; and by the aid of a little judicious flattery and a pannikin of grog, we succeeded in appeasing Driscoll's passion, and prevailing on him to tell us his adventure, which he did in the following words:

' You nearly all know Wantabadgery Station above Wagga-Wagga. Well, two years ago, Bill Kelly and I took three hundred fat beasts from there to fetch into Bendigo. The feed was good, and we came down the river-bank till we reached Lang's, where we crossed the cattle. It was late in the afternoon when we got out on the plain; and the sun was just dipping as we were abreast of the Black Swamp; so we rounded up the cattle, and determined to stop there for the night. We hobbled our horses close at hand, lit our fire, and had our suppers. Then we agreed that I should take the first watch; so Kelly rolled himself up in his possum-rug, and I went down to have a look at the cattle and horses. I found them all right; so I went back to the fire, heaped on fresh fuel, and then stretched myself down to have a comfortable smoke. I was pretty tired with riding all day, and the fire was hot, so in a short time I dozed off. I must have slept three or four hours, for the cold awoke me, as the fire was very low; so I got up and put on more wood, and then I thought I'd just go round the cattle before I waked Kelly to take my watch. So I caught and saddled my mare, and rode away to the cattle-camp. The moon was at the full, and shining brightly, and the beasts had drawn out on the plain to feed; so, of course, I started to head them back. I was cantering along when all of a sudden the leading cattle came galloping back, and as they wheeled, a man passed close to me, riding a bald-faced cob, and coming from the

opposite direction. Now, Kelly's horse was bald-faced, so I thought that he had waked up and come out to look after me, so I rode on towards the camp. When I got there, to my great surprise I saw Kelly lying quite snugly rolled up in his rug, and apparently fast asleep. This very naturally vexed me, so I shook him roughly, and when he sat up, says I to him : "Kelly, what do you mean by going and lying down again, when you know it's your watch?"

"Lying down again?" replied he. "Why, I never woke at all till now."

"What!" cried I ; "do you want to deny that you passed me just now out on the plain heading back the cattle? I did not see your face, but I saw the bald face of Dandy plain enough."

"At that, Kelly jumped up as if he was shot. "Saddle up, for your life, Driscoll," said he, "and let us be off. You've seen the ghost of the trotting cob, and we're both dead men."

"Well, we jumped on our horses; and by daybreak we had got as far as Broderip's Station; and next night we camped just where we now are; but that very trip, Kelly was drowned in the Campaspe, and I broke two ribs and my collar-bone. So I for one would sooner go a hundred miles round than camp again near the Black Swamp, and chance seeing the ghost of the trotting cob."

When Driscoll had finished, the conversation naturally turned on apparitions, and 'Fisher's Ghost' was triumphantly quoted as an unanswerable argument in their favour; but there were still several who laughed at the idea of such things. At last a bullock-driver from the Sydney side said : 'There are ghosts, there's no denying; and I'll tell you of one that hundreds heard about, and many of you know the man who saw it, and you can ask *himself* about it. Many of you have been up the Murray towards Albury, and have passed Brown's Station just above Quart-Quart. Well, when I was a government-man, I was doing my time near Camden, and in those days Brown had a farm at the Cow-pastures, close to where I was living. He had just settled down on the Murray with a few hundred head of cattle, and stopped there five or six months, putting up huts and yards, and breaking in the cattle to the run; so when he thought everything was going on well, he started for down-country, intending to bring up more stock in a short time. He travelled on horseback, for there were no mail-coaches to the Murray then, and as he pushed on pretty sharp, he was very tired when he got to the Myrtle Creek. He told Thomson, the landlord, to call him early in the morning, took his supper, and two or three glasses of rum, and then went to bed. Towards morning, something awoke him, and when he opened his eyes he saw his wife standing by the bedside. Before he could speak to her, she told him "to get up," and went out of the room at once. Well, Brown was greatly surprised, of course, at seeing her at that place, but he thought that she had come to meet him, so he got up and dressed himself. When he went down, he looked in the parlours; but as he could not see her, he began to call out her name. At last, the noise he made roused up the landlord, and he came and asked what the matter was.'

"Why," says Brown, "I want my wife. She's come and waked me, and now she's hid herself."

"You're dreaming, man," cried the landlord. "How can your wife be here? You know she's at the Cow-pasture Farm."

"What!" rejoined Brown; "do you mean to say that she did not come here since I went to bed?"

"Of course she didn't," replied the landlord, "for I locked the door when I went to bed, and the key is under my pillow."

"With that, Brown grew quite frightened. "Saddle my horse at once," said he, "for so sure as I'm a living man, my wife came and spoke to me to-night, and I'm greatly afraid that something has

happened to her at home." With that, he mounted and galloped off. He rode till he knocked up his horse, and then he borrowed a fresh one, and kept on as fast as he could ride, so that, before sunset, he came close to the Cow-pasture Farm. As he galloped up, he could see there was something unusual going on, for several horses were fastened to the posts of the verandah, the working-men were standing in groups at the doors of their huts, and two or three troopers were lounging about near the stockyard. Brown jumped off his horse, and was going at once into his house, but one of his neighbours came out, and met him at the door. This gentleman led him away to a little distance, and told him as gradually as he could what had taken place. Now, boys, Brown was a good master to his assigned servants, but his wife was a tyrant, and while he was at the Murray, she had been stopping the rations of the government-men, and sending them up to court. There was one man in particular she took a great dislike to; he could do nothing right, and almost every Monday morning he got his fifty lashes at the nearest courthouse. At last, he got desperate. He was chopping some wood, when she came up to him, and after abusing him, said : "I'll get you fifty more on Monday next." "I may get the fifty," cried he, "but you'll not live to know of it;" and with that he lifted the axe he had in his hand, and split her skull. This happened at the Cow-pastures at the very hour when she was seen by Brown in the inn at Myrtle Creek; so you see, boys, there can be no doubt but ghosts do sometimes appear on earth.'

"Of course, there's no doubt at all about that," said an old shepherd, who had just come up to the camp, "for I was close to one myself, and my mate saw it quite plainly, and as it was a quare thing, I'll tell ye all about it. You that are from the Sydney side must recollect the time when the fires were seen every night on King's Plains, near Bathurst, and how all the people went out to see them, and the priest tried to lay the spirit. All that was told in the Bathurst papers, but I never told any one till now what happened to Red Jack and me there. You see, I'd been shepherding at Wargoola, near Carcoar, and when the shearing was over, I got another man to take my flock for a bit, and went into Bathurst to buy some things and have a spree. Well, of course, in a few days I'd very near spent my cheque, and as I was just thinking of making a start, I fell in with Red Jack. He was an old mate of mine, and he'd been down in town for some weeks, so you may be sure he had 'pockets to let.' He was looking for a job; so I told him to come on with me to Wargoola, and he'd be sure of employment, for they wanted some hands on the station. Jack said "he was glad of the chance;" so he rolled up his blankets; I got my traps and a couple of bottles for the road, and away we went out of Bathurst. We had been nobblerising about the public-houses, and we were both pretty *fresh* when we started; so we walked along very gaily, and never took any notice of the time till it began to grow dusk, and then we found we were coming on to King's Plains. We looked about for a good camping-place as we walked on; and just as it grew dark, we saw the light of a large fire away to the right, and then another, and another. "Come on," said Jack; "we're all right now; there's some overseagers there with cattle, and we'll go down to their camp."

"With that we turned in off the road, and went towards the nearest fire; but when we got to it, there was no one there. We cooed, but there was no answer; so we pushed for the next, thinking the men might have shifted their camp. Well, when we got to it, there was no one there either; and then all of a sudden I recollect what I had heard them speaking of in Bathurst; so I told Jack of it, and told him we'd better get away at once; but he only

laughed at the thoughts of a spirit. Well, we lit our pipes, and had a good stiff glass apiece out of one of the bottles, and then Jack said he'd go and have a look for the ghost, and he asked me if I was game to go with him. Well, I didn't like to back out, so off we went towards the next fire ; and when we came near it, we could see some one moving about and piling on wood. "There's your ghost for you," says Jack. "Hollo, mate, will you have a glass?" But the figure kept on at the fire, and made no answer. By this time we had got quite close to the fire, and as it blazed up, we saw quite plainly the figure of a man, but he had no head on his shoulders—nothing but a blood-stained stump of a neck, and yet he was going about quite contentedly feeding the fire. I thought I'd have dropped, but Jack said : "Come on ; we'll grab him, ghost or no ghost." Then he put the bottle to his mouth, and took a long drink ; I took another, and then Jack ran round the fire one way, and I ran another. As we got to the other side, we could see the Headless Shepherd standing between us. "I have you now," cried Jack, and tried to lay hold of him. I did the same, but he slipped through our fingers, and we caught only one another, and down we fell ; and when we came to ourselves, the sun was shining overhead, and nothing remained of the ghost except the wood-ashes at the different fires. Jack and I went on to Wargoola ; but what became of the ghost I don't know, as I went down to the Darling soon after.

This story started the dispute about spirits afresh, for there were some 'new chums' present who had never read the Bathurst papers of the period, and they said that Rum was the only spirit that Red Jack and his mate had seen on King's Plains. However, the 'old hands' would not listen to this, and the dispute began to grow furious. At last, Jim Ryan, an Irish native, roared out in a rage : 'It's my belief ye're no better than haythens ; and the next thing you'll do will be to deny the Coöee Hut!' This was evidently considered a conclusive argument by all the old bushmen, and their opponents were compelled to confess their ignorance of the Coöee Hut, and to ask for an account of it. For a short time, Jim Ryan refused to satisfy them, but at last he allowed himself to be persuaded.

The hut we call the Coöee or Mendering Hut is out on the Yareko Creek, at the back of Goree Run ; and the way it got that name was this : At the time when the Billilong and Yareko were first settled on, there was a man named Bill White employed at Goree Station. He was an emigrant, and had not been long in the colony, so they used to keep him about the home-station chopping wood and carting water, and helping up at the draughting-yards occasionally. Well, it happened that one of the shepherds had a row with the overseer, and got discharged at once ; so, as they had no one else handy, they determined to send Bill White shepherding till they could get another man. The hut is twenty-five miles back from Goree ; so the overseer went out himself with Bill and the sheep, and then stopped a day with him, to shew him the run. Bill had no hut-keeper, but he managed pretty well for two or three days ; but one very hot day he must have fallen asleep in the middle of the day, when the sheep were in camp, and did not awake till they were drawn out. He was, as I told you, a new chum, and did not know anything about tracking, so he wandered vaguely up and down, looking for the flock, until he lost himself completely. The dusk was coming on, so he began coöeeing till he was fairly worn out, and then lay down to sleep. Next morning, he started again, but he had got confused ; and you know the Yareko country is very puzzling, for the sandhills and plains are so much alike, it's very hard to tell one from another. Well, poor Bill tried to travel by the sun ; but as he kept following it, he went round

and round, and at dusk was near the place he started from. He had no food, and could not find the creek, so he was dying of thirst, for it was burning hot weather. He coöeed again and again, till he fell exhausted, and there he lay till morning. In the morning he arose and crawled a few yards, then down he sank, and there he perished. Meanwhile, the sheep had gone to another out-station, ten miles further back, where they had been running formerly ; and as the feed was good, they stopped there very contentedly for seven or eight days, when the overseer happened to see them, and of course he brought them in to the home-station, and then went out to tell Bill White to come in himself. When he got to the hut, he found the ashes cold on the hearth ; and he could see that White had not been in for some days ; so in a great fright he galloped back to the home-station, and mustered all hands to go and look for Bill. He took two black trackers also ; and as I happened to be passing, I went out. Well, it was near dusk when we got out to the hut, and of course we could do nothing that night, so we hobbled the horses, and went into the hut. We were just getting our suppers when we heard a faint coöee, and then another and another. Of course, we answered at once, for we were in hopes that it was Bill White coming up ; but the sound came no nearer, though the coöee was repeated every four or five minutes. We then thought that perhaps he had been hurt, and could not walk ; so several of us went out to look for him, but we could see nothing of him, though the coöeeing still continued, and apparently quite close to us. In about an hour, it ceased suddenly, and we went back to the hut greatly puzzled, and very uneasy. In the morning at daylight we started, and the blacks very soon found poor Bill's track ; it was by them that I was enabled to tell you of his rambling about, for they traced all his wanderings, pointed out where he sat, and where he slept, and at last brought us to where his body lay ; and strange to relate, he had died within less than a mile of his home ; but it was on a different side to that on which he had been accustomed to take out the sheep. We buried him in an adjacent sandhill, where you may see his grave fenced in ; but since that time, no one will live in that hut, for every evening from dusk till dark poor Bill White is heard coöeeing ; and plenty who never heard of the story, and have chanced to camp in the neighbourhood, have heard the sound, and have imagined that some traveller was coming, little thinking that it was the spirit of Bill White wandering about the Coöee Hut.'

When this tale was ended, midnight had passed some time ; and as we had all to be up at daylight, to put our stock across the Edward River, there was a general move. The visitors filled and lit their pipes, took a parting glass, and went off to their respective camps ; while I, rolling myself up in my opossum rug, went off into dreamland, into a slumber such as those who live at home at ease can never hope to enjoy.

THE PROBLEM OF TRANSMUTATION SOLVED.

The dream of the alchemists, *lapis philosophorum*, that miraculous agent by which man was to acquire not only the power of transmutation of metals, but to enter into possession of a universal medicine, an elixir of life, is one of the most remarkable and unaccountable phenomena in the history of the human mind. What endless hours of labour, what nights of toil, and years of anxiety have been spent by the enthusiastic alchemist in his obscure and dusty laboratory! It is hard to conceive that this persevering labour, which spread more or less over

a period of twelve centuries, was entirely vain. As concerns the discovery of the philosopher's stone, it is evident that none such has yet been made. But may we not look upon the wonderful science of modern chemistry as having originated in the obscure labours of the adepts? And if so, what greater benefit could the alchemical band of the middle ages have bestowed upon their fellow-creatures.

It is difficult to trace out the origin of true science, in the confusion of ideas which reigned for years before modern chemistry came to light; but the old alchemists discovered many useful substances—for instance, sulphuric acid, sulphate of iron or green vitriol, nitric acid, zinc, and phosphorus, which, in the hands of modern philosophers, have yielded an endless variety of treasures.

About the year 1780, when alchemy was fast disappearing, and giving place to the precise results of modern chemistry, the pretended art of transmutations appears to have been suddenly resuscitated in London and in Berlin. There exist, indeed, a few alchemists, in the true sense of the term, at the present day; more than one who believes that metals will some day be found to be transmutable, and that a universal medicine, or an elixir of life, will really be discovered before many years have elapsed, will probably read these very lines, and—may they profit by them.

The sensation just alluded to was created in London by certain publications emanating from the pen of a man who held a somewhat distinguished position in science, and had contributed not a little to the chemical knowledge of his day. This man was James Price, M.D., F.R.S. He was in possession of a considerable fortune, and, what was more, of two powders, a white and a red one, by means of which he assured the world that he could convert common metals into silver and gold. It is true that his experiments only produced very small quantities of the precious metals; but on one occasion, on the 30th May 1782, when operating before a numerous assembly, Price, by using only twelve grains of his philosophical powder, converted sixty ounces of mercury into two ounces and a half of silver, and presented the little bar of metal thus obtained to George III. It was then that Price published his *Account of some Experiments on Mercury, Silver, and Gold*, which excited so much curiosity in the public, that his colleagues of the Royal Society thought proper to name a commission, in order to inquire thoroughly into the matter, and, if possible, to discover where the error lay. But the doctor at first refused to divulge his secret, alleging that his provision of philosophical powder was almost exhausted in the experiments already made, and that it took a long time and much trouble to prepare more. At length, however, at the instance of Sir Joseph Banks and others, he determined to recommence his experiments. He retired to his laboratory at Guildford, and for a period of six or nine months, nothing more was heard of Price's transmutations, and the members of the Royal Society began to think that he had discovered his errors, and had consequently abandoned these futile researches. They were not a little surprised, therefore, on receiving from Price, in August 1783, an invitation to attend his laboratory for the purpose of witnessing a transmutation. Two or three members only thought proper to respond to this invitation, and in their presence Price swallowed a bottle of prussic acid, and died before any antidote could be administered to him.

At this time there lived in Germany a man named Semler, an honest, hard-working, persevering seeker after knowledge. John Solomon Semler was known among a wide circle of admirers as a learned theo-

logian, and held a chair of theology in the university of Halle. Whilst quite a child, he often listened eagerly to the wondrous stories related now and then to his father by an alchemist called Taubenschutz. This Taubenschutz was an alchemist somewhat after his time; most of his life was passed in the preparation of the philosopher's stone, in which he believed firmly, in spite of the progress of science; and the miraculous accounts which he gave of its virtues in the presence of young Semler, imbued the latter with such a taste for chemical experiments, that in after-life, when deeply engaged in the study of theology, and in the pursuit of his profession, he always managed to devote a few hours in the week to chemistry. In his little studio or laboratory might be seen all the tinctures, acids, alkalies, salts, &c., that could be procured for love or money; and his investigations appear to have borne mainly upon the elucidation of the great problem of the alchemists.

Although his experiments never procured him the least spark of light, or advanced him one step nearer to the desired goal, Semler obstinately persevered. When his studies at the university were ended, and his acquirements as a theologian had procured for him a professorship at Halle, he had a little more spare time at his disposal, and this he likewise devoted to chemical experiments. At this period, he turned for a while from his laboratory, and began to consult the large *in folio* relics of the middle ages. It is impossible to say precisely what ideas he gleaned from the writings of Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Paracelsus, and Van Helmont; but, however scanty, they were probably sufficient for a man who had a blind faith in alchemy, without any notion of the laws of exact science.

A circumstance occurred, however, in the midst of his chemical mania, for we can call it by no other name, which tended by no means to lessen his belief in the marvels of alchemy. Semler had not long enjoyed his position as Professor of Theology in the university of Halle, before the gossips of the town had spread the report that the worthy professor was attached to the problem of transmutations, and that his greatest enjoyment appeared to reside in the pursuit of his chemical labours. It is not astonishing, therefore, that one evening a friend rushed almost into Semler's arms to inform him of the arrival in Halle of a stranger who had just travelled from Africa, in seemingly very distressed circumstances, but who possessed a piece of intelligence which was calculated to prove of infinite advantage to any learned man who might choose to avail himself of the information. The stranger, a shabbily dressed Jew, was accordingly introduced to Semler the next day. In the most mysterious manner, the Jew placed before the theologian-alchemist a greasy piece of paper, on which were written about a dozen lines in Hebrew characters; but the words were Arabic. He stated, at the same time, that he came from Tunis, and that at Tunis, Tripoli, and Fez there lived a great number of Jews, who had received as an inheritance from their forefathers the golden secret of alchemy. They were perfectly well acquainted with the art of making gold, he assured the professor, but they only made use of this important art in the most urgent cases of necessity, so fearful were they lest their secret should by some accident be revealed to their neighbours. The stranger said, moreover, that he had served for many years in the house of one of these eastern Jews, and had more than once assisted his master in a work of transmutation. The writing which he placed in the hands of Semler contained the whole secret of the process, and was an exact indication of all the operations to be performed. He understood perfectly the whole of this writing, and would explain it to Semler, only he had, unfortunately, forgotten the precise meaning of three words, without

which the rest was useless to him. This caused him the greatest distress, and he offered the paper to the theologian, not doubting that the professor himself, or some of his learned friends, would easily discover the sense of the three words, and with the condition that they should both work out the process together, to their mutual advantage, as soon as the whole should be properly interpreted.

The worthy theologian could scarcely conceal the joy he felt at the conclusion of this story, and certainly imagined that he was about to enter into possession of the secret which he had so fruitlessly endeavoured to wrest from nature. He accepted without delay the kind offer made by the Jew, requesting the latter to keep the affair strictly secret, and to come back to him in the course of a few days.

Semler set to work that same evening to translate the logograph which had so curiously fallen into his hands, and after a considerable amount of labour, fancied he had succeeded in finding out the meaning of about seven words, but all the rest remained a mystery to him. He was therefore obliged to take for granted the sense of the remainder as translated to him by the Jew, and to endeavour, by all the means in his power, to discover the sense of the three words of which his interpreter was ignorant. His linguistic resources having failed him in this respect, he applied to the most learned Orientalists of the town, and to the professors of the university, but all in vain; no one had ever seen the words before, nor was any one able to discover even their approximate meaning.

When this perplexing work had been proceeded with for five whole days, the stranger returned, and Semler informed him pitifully of his want of success. The Jew appeared greatly discomfited, as might have been expected, for he assured the professor that his only resource now was to return to Africa, to learn from his old master the meaning of the three words. Whether or not the worthy Semler found the Jew, who was evidently an impostor, the funds necessary to perform his journey to Tunis, we cannot say; but this adventure had upon the Professor of Halle the direct effect of increasing tenfold his belief in alchemy, and all the marvels related to him in former years concerning the properties of the philosopher's stone rose again most vividly in his mind.

Time rolled quietly on; Semler continued perseveringly his search after the mysterious *lapis*, prolonging his experiments long after dusk, without discovering anything remarkable until the year 1786, when a certain Baron Leopold von Hirschen announced to the world his discovery of a medicine which he called the *salt of life*. This medicine, supposed to be universal, was naturally advertised as the most wonderful discovery of the day, and calculated to insure unheard-of benefits to suffering humanity. Semler, who bought up all kinds of drugs for his experiments, soon procured some of this new product, and set to work upon it with such enthusiasm, that he published three consecutive papers on the subject. He pretended that he knew more about the *salt of life* than the person who had invented it. Improving upon the wonderful assertions of the baron, he unhesitatingly assured the world that it was not only a universal medicine, but also an agent of transmutation. With this new product, he stated, neither charcoal, nor crucible, nor mercury, was required to convert common metals into gold. It was sufficient to dissolve the wonderful product in water, and to abandon it to itself for some days in a glass vessel kept warm, when gold was sure to appear, and deposit itself at the bottom of the phial.

These announcements coming from a professor of the university of Halle, could not fail to attract considerable attention. At the period of which we are writing, science had taken a firm stand; alchemy was

forgotten, or nearly so, by the learned men of the day, and it was only here and there in Europe that some obscure mind, which had not kept pace with the march of progress, still leaned towards the mysterious operations of the adepts.

Numerous objections to Semler's views were brought forward; considerable discussion ensued; and his friends thought it best he should make a public demonstration of his experiments, in order that the contest might stand upon a fair basis; supposing, no doubt, that the error, if such existed, would thus come to light. The theologian acceded with the utmost good-nature, and perfectly confident of his results, he determined to set the matter before an analytical chemist. Dr Gren was fixed upon as the chemist who should decide the question, inasmuch as he had taken a considerable part in the discussion; and accordingly, in 1787, Semler sent him a phial containing a brown-coloured salt, requesting him to examine it, and to lay the result publicly before the Academy of Berlin; assuring him, at the same time, that as soon as this salt was dissolved in water and warmed for a few days, it would begin to deposit gold—the fact being positively certain, Semler added, inasmuch as he had already procured a notable amount of gold from the very specimen he handed to Gren. Frederick Gren, a man of considerable talent, was not long in perceiving that fragments of gold-leaf were already mixed with the salt when he received it, and separated easily by the addition of water. He stated his conviction that gold had been mixed with the salt; in reply to which Semler asserted energetically that this gold was formed spontaneously in the liquid. But Gren refused to yield. Whereupon it was unanimously decided to place the matter before Klaproth, one of the most learned men of the day, and the greatest chemist in Germany.

Another specimen of the *salt of life* was accordingly forwarded to Berlin, to the laboratory of Klaproth, who carefully analysed the now celebrated substance, and found it to be composed of sulphate of magnesia and sulphate of soda, mixed with urine and gold-leaf. As the sample forwarded was very small, and Klaproth wished to decide the matter in the most satisfactory manner possible, he wrote to the professor of Halle, begging him to forward a larger specimen of the same product. Semler, with his usual good-nature, hastened to comply with the request, and forwarded to Berlin two large phials, the one containing a brown crystallised salt, in which, he stated, gold had not yet been produced; and the other, to use his own expression, 'being a liquid which already contained the seed of gold, and which, by the aid of warmth, would fecundate the salt.' The salt being dissolved in the liquid, and the whole being kept at an appropriate temperature, would yield gold in a few days.

But, like Gren, Klaproth saw at once that the crystallised salt had already particles of gold-leaf mixed with it, and by dissolving it in pure water, this gold separated from it without the addition of the liquid in the second phial. The alchemist of Halle was not in the least disconcerted; in spite of all that had passed, he felt confident that his illustrious correspondent would soon be convinced of the possibility of making gold. He forwarded more and more specimens of gold-leaf manufactured by the aid of the *salt of life*, calling them *curcum philosophicum aëreum*, some of which were of considerable dimensions, measuring as much as eight or nine square inches. Semler begged the learned chemist to do him the justice of analysing this product in the presence of the members of the Berlin Academy, so that, at least, it should be known to the world that real gold was produced, whether the true process was understood or not. So satisfied was Semler that his discovery would sooner or later be appreciated as it deserved, that his faith in alchemy was not yet shaken.

in the least degree, for his experiments with the *salt of life* had always yielded him gold, and the gold itself was of the purest quality. A fragment of one of his letters to Klaproth has been preserved : it states :

' My experiments are more prosperous than ever. Two of my phials already contain gold, which I withdraw from them every fifth or sixth day. I extract each time from twelve to fifteen grains. Two or three other phials appear to be beginning; I see a little gold glittering near the bottom of them. But at present the process is expensive, each grain of gold that I produce costs me two, three, and sometimes four Prussian thalers ; this is owing, no doubt, to some imperfection in the manner of operating.'

Klaproth did not hesitate to comply with the request of the theologian, and determined to test the gold before the members of the Academy of Sciences. The subject had made much noise in Berlin, and the assembly was more numerous than usual. After the usual preliminary business had been disposed of, Klaproth rose and laid the results of his investigation of Semler's *salt of life* before the meeting. Taking in his hand a test-tube, and placing in it some of the gold produced by the learned theologian, he shewed, by pouring upon it a few drops of acid, that it was not gold at all, but simply common yellow copper foil ; in other words, that the gold in question was nothing more than ordinary brass. This declaration caused, as may easily be imagined, an outburst of hilarity, which soon spread from the academy over the whole of Germany, where nothing was more talked of for the next few weeks than the famous discovery of the great theologian of Halle, who, having made gold, and written considerable memoirs upon the process, had sent this same gold to be analysed by Klaproth, when it turned out to be brass !

The good-tempered, self-confident Semler was thus forced to open his eyes at last, and after taking a more careful view of the whole matter than he had ever done before, discovered the source of the mystification, the nature of which came to light as follows.

The learned professor used to perform his chemical experiments in a country house, where he was attended by an old servant, who had the greatest regard for him. It was this servant who had charge of the store in which were placed the phials where the mysterious salt fructified and yielded gold. The worthy domestic had remarked the ardour and persevering stimulus with which his master carried on his chemical operations, and the profound joy which attended the success of any of his experiments. Wishing to contribute as much as possible to the happiness of his master, the amiable old man conceived the notion of slipping a little gold-leaf into the phials with which the theologian experimented. But it happened now and then that he was obliged to absent himself, for he was not only the servant of the professor, but a soldier of the king of Prussia, and his presence as such was sometimes demanded at the reviews which took place at Magdeburg ; in which case he was relieved in his guard by his wife, to whom he passed the watchword. This ingenuous woman continued to supply the gold-leaf as it was required ; but thinking, no doubt, that the expenditure of gold was a needless outlay, and that brass would answer the purpose just as well, the economical old lady had prevailed upon her husband to make use of a few thin sheets of brass that were lying about the house. The *aurum philosophicum* analysed by Klaproth was no other !

Semler, who had been labouring under a complete delusion, acquitted himself honourably before the public of Germany. He has left us in an autobiography the most candid confession of his alchemical errors, in return for which the inhabitants of Berlin have rather pitied than ridiculed him.

THE COMMON.

THERE the star-blossomed chickweed grows,
And there the yellow groundsel blows,
On which the goldfinch feeds ;
There sleeps the pond, all freckled o'er
With duckweed bright, a golden store,
'Neath which the horse-leech breeds.

There the gold-sprinkled furze-bush flings
Its mellow glory wide ; there sings
The linnet 'mong the spears—
The guardian thorn-spears that surround
His favourite dwelling, and oft wound
The nester's brow and ears.

There, culling bluish wild-flowers gay,
A merry group of children stray,
Linked by health's rosy charm ;
The youngest one is all behind,
Slow toddling up against the wind,
With bonnet on her arm.

There's a lean strip : the absent grass
Proclaims that swift feet o'er it pass,
And keep the green'ry down :
'Tis the young cricketers' freehold,
For splendid hits and catches bold,
The scene of great renown.

There stands an urchin winding in
His kite, that looks as reed-flag thin,
Struggling so high o'erhead ;
Guiding the captive quite at will,
A consciousness of strength and skill
May on his face be read.

Upon its quiet reedy marge,
Poor ill-used Neddy roams at large,
Cropping the herbage sweet ;
While near stands, the horse-pensioner,
That scarcely now a limb can stir
'Mid mates of nimble feet.

REVISED CODE OF EDUCATION.

Now Completed,

CHAMBERS'S NARRATIVE SERIES OF STANDARD READING BOOKS

Infant School Primer, 1 <i>d.</i>	Standard III, . . .	10 <i>d.</i>
Standard I, . . .	6 <i>d.</i>	Standard IV, . . . 1 <i>s.</i> 4 <i>d.</i>
Standard II, . . .	8 <i>d.</i>	Standard V, . . . 1 <i>s.</i> 6 <i>d.</i>
Standard VI, . . .		2 <i>s.</i>

The above are applicable to every School in Great Britain, and have already been extensively adopted. The publishers will have much pleasure in forwarding, free, a prospectus, the Primer, and Standard I. to Schoolmasters and other teachers on application.

All communications to be addressed to 'The Editors of Chambers's Journal, 47 Paternoster Row, London,' accompanied by postage-stamps, as the return of rejected contributions cannot otherwise be guaranteed. Communications should also, in every case, be accompanied by the writer's Christian and surname in full.

Printed and Published by W. & R. CHAMBERS, 47 Paternoster Row, LONDON, and 339 High Street, EDINBURGH. Also sold by all Booksellers.